Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica, **13**, 2 (2021) 112–129

DOI: 10.2478/ausp-2021-0016

# Metaphors in Crisis (On COVID-19 in Romanian and US Articles)

Gabriela CHEFNEUX
Transilvania University of Braşov, Romania
Department of Literature and Cultural Studies
gabriela.chefneux@unitbv.ro

**Abstract.** The aim of the paper is to identify similarities and differences in terms of the metaphors used to present the COVID-19 crisis in Romanian and US articles. The paper is structured in two parts – a theoretical and a practical one. The theoretical framework presents metaphors from the cognitive linguistic perspective as a way to understand and explain reality, metaphors playing a major part in human thinking. They are approached in the paper as a subjective way of presenting reality, being indicative of cultural differences. The practical part analyses thirteen Romanian and US articles taken from broadsheet newspapers, focusing on three areas – the presentation of the virus, people's reaction to it, and the vaccine – in order to see the types of metaphors and the source domains used.

**Keywords**: metaphor, cognitive linguistics, mapping, newspaper articles

## 1. Theoretical framework

### 1.1. Definition and features of metaphors

Traditionally, metaphors have been defined as a figure of speech, characteristic of literary language, which involves an implied comparison between two terms and points to a pre-existing similarity between them; the features of one domain are transferred to another one, and thus one thing is used to stand for another.

This traditional view of metaphor was critiqued by Max Black (1962), who states that metaphors have a cognitive dimension, as they are a way of organizing human perception, rather than an artistic function. Thus, metaphors acquire an ontological function emphasizing specific features of an object over others. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) continue the cognitive theoretical theory, proving that metaphors are based on human bodily experience; for example, "up" acquires a positive value while "down" a negative one, being closely connected to early

BDD-A33017 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:58:35 UTC)

childhood experience. It is the notion of embodiment that sets off the cognitive linguistic view from the traditional one (Kövecses 2010: xii).

The cognitive linguistic view approaches metaphors as a basic way for people to comprehend and explain reality since metaphors are used to understand abstract concepts by resorting to more concrete sources. Lakoff (1993) advances to the concept of "cognitive disposition" to account for established correspondences between targets and source. These correspondences, which connect sensorimotor experiences to more abstract concepts, become fixed in the human mind, calling each other; an example would be the correspondence between a love relationship and a journey. The example provided by Lakoff is the following: "The lovers correspond to travelers. The love relationship corresponds to the vehicle. The lovers' common goals correspond to their common destinations on the journey. Difficulties in the relationship correspond to impediments to travel" (Lakoff 1993: 207).

After being established, such correspondences begin to manifest themselves in various verbal expressions, which have a metaphorical character: "Our relationship has hit a dead-end street… Look how far we've come. We can't turn back now. It's been a long, bumpy road. We're at a crossroads. We may have to go our separate ways. The relationship isn't going anywhere", etc. (Lakoff 1993: 206).

Therefore, an initial single metaphor (love is a journey) can be expressed in different ways, which are all surface structure ways of expressing underlying meanings.

The critique brought to this theory was that bodily experience is also influenced by cultural factors (Mottier 2008). Similarly, Goatly believes that "Body and bodily experience are affected by culture, so the fact that bodily experience gives an experiential basis for metaphors does not entail that all kinds of bodily experience are universal" (Goatly 1998: 216), and Kövecses expressed the same point of view: "The ground of metaphor is human experience, which includes bodily, perceptual, cognitive, biological and cultural ones, domains which can combine, generating correlations" (Kövecses 2010: 325).

Kövecses (2010), a supporter of the cognitive theory, demonstrates that metaphors are used in a variety of discourse types, ranging from literature to advertisements, and that they can be realized non-linguistically too in other areas of human experience – acting, cartoons, drawings, sculptures, architecture, sounds, or gestures.

In this paper, metaphors are approached as a fundamental way of understanding reality, but also as a figure of speech, which may draw attention of unexpected similarities between objects. Metaphors also have an ideological function as they emphasize particular features of objects over others and are culturally influenced. As already stated, metaphors have been explained as thinking of one thing (A) in terms of another (B), where A is called the topic or the target, and B is the vehicle or source (Goatly 1998: 11).

BDD-A33017 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:58:35 UTC)

The source usually resorts to a more concrete concept, while the target is usually a more abstract term; the direction is only one – from the more concrete to the more abstract domain, a process explained by the way the human mind works (Kövecses 2010: 8–9). The transfer between these two terms relies on mapping, which means establishing similarities or analogies between A and B (Goatly 1998: 11).

Chilton defines mapping as follows: "presupposing that the two domains are already structurally similar, metaphors work by projecting one relatively well-understood set of ideas onto a domain that is problematic, rather than by simply expressing a pre-existing and objective similarity" (Chilton 1996: 106).

As the definition indicates, the choice of similar elements between the source and the target is not objective.

There are domain sources that are more frequently used, such as the "human body, health and illness, animals, plants, buildings and constructions, machines and tools, games and sports, business, cooking and food, heat and cold, light and darkness, forces, movement and direction", etc. (Kövecses 2010: 8–22).

It is often the case that several source domains are used to understand a particular target, as each of the source domains accounts for a particular aspect of the target – "a concept is jointly understood by several metaphors as this is a more efficient way of understanding the concept" (Kövecses 2010: 96).

According to Grady (1999), metaphors can be motivated by three factors – correlation (related to human experience), resemblance (related to the similarities between the source and the target), and generic (a structural type of similarity).

Kövecses (2010) introduces the concepts of partial mapping and partial metaphorical utilization. Partial mapping refers to the fact that the similarities between the source and the target are adopted, as they do not pre-exist, and the gap that has to be filled can be more or less obvious. Partial metaphorical utilization accounts for the use of certain aspects of the source domain that explain the target and for the ideological character of metaphor, as it foregrounds certain features of an object and reduces others, which results in a subjective way of understanding reality:

> Metaphors may have negative effects on thinking by providing a false sense of understanding and excluding alternative conceptualization, or may structure the Target domain in ways which are too simple or too partial. They have a tendency to form regimes of truth to create a model of reality – thinking makes it so. We need a variety of metaphors to survive or a suspicion about all metaphor if we are to be open to the realities beyond it. (Kövecses 2010: xi)

Metaphors have been classified according to several criteria, such as novelty, sources used, ontology and orientation, complexity, diversity, and cultural

**BDD-A33017 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó**
**Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:58:35 UTC)**

variation. In terms of novelty, metaphors are differentiated as being live, or original, and dead. The latter category is already part of the lexicon, being no longer perceived as metaphors by language users. Cognitive linguistics states that dead metaphors do not influence people's thinking to a great extent, while the conceptual metaphor theory claims that they do, albeit in an unconscious way (Goatly 1998: 22). Metaphors move along a scale from more conventional (metaphors that are very familiar and frequently used) to less conventional ones, also called "novel metaphors", which prevail in literature; nevertheless, conventional metaphors can be expressed in unconventional ways. Conceptual metaphors are defined as metaphors describing a more abstract concept by resorting to a more concrete source. In a text, conceptual metaphors are manifested by means of linguistic metaphorical expressions (e.g. life is a journey, trip, road, path, etc.) (Kövecses 2010: 4).

Another classification differentiates between ontological metaphors (metaphors which allow the speakers to understand their experiences in terms of general objects or substances) and orientational ones (metaphors that resort to spatial orientation – such as up–down, in–out, etc.). The difference between ontological and orientational metaphors is that the former class covers a wider range of concepts, while the latter relates more to spatial representation. In terms of complexity, there are complex and simple metaphors; a simple metaphor resorts to one single important feature of an entity, while a complex metaphor consists of several simple ones (Kövecses 2010).

Metaphors can be diversified (the target is expressed by bringing together several sources, e.g. failure is division, shipwreck, or sinking) and multivalent (several targets are used to describe the same source, e.g. liquid is crowds, traffic, emotion, etc.) (Goatly 1998: 12–13).

Metaphors are deeply influenced by culture with metaphorical variation within one culture (intracultural) and between several cultures (intercultural); intracultural metaphors can be further classified in terms of levels: general – all speakers of the language use them; individual – the lowest usage level (Kövecses 2010: 324).

There are two comprehensive metaphorical systems, namely the Great Chain metaphor, which resorts to source domains such as human body, buildings, machines, plants, etc., and the Event Structure metaphor, which resorts to concepts such as location, force, and motion (Kövecses 2010, Lakoff–Turner 1989, Musolff 2005).

To conclude, metaphors have a dual function – the foremost being the cognitive one, as it helps us to understand abstract concepts by resorting to more physical and concrete objects, and a stylistic one. However, the choice of particular similarities between the target and the source are characterized by cultural factors and subjectivity.

BDD-A33017 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:58:35 UTC)

This analysis of metaphors related to the COVID-19 crisis as depicted in Romanian and US articles is based on the cognitive function of metaphors as the predominant one, takes into account subjectivity and cultural factors, and aims to identify the sources for the metaphors journalists deploy in order to describe the crisis.

## 2. Data analysis

### 2.1. Articles selected

This part of the paper analyses several articles from Romanian and US newspapers. The aim is to compare the metaphors used to describe the COVID crisis in terms of source with the purpose of identifying similarities and differences between them. The hypothesis is that these differences are indicative of the cultural way of describing and understanding the world.

The selection principles of the articles were that the headlines include the term COVID, that they be published in broadsheet newspapers, and that they have a similar overall length. The analysis is a starting point for a more in-depth study, which tries to establish common COVID-19-related topics, metaphors used to describe them, and source domains in broadsheet articles published in Romania and the US. For the current analysis, the articles were a non-probability, convenience sample. The common element is the overall length of the articles. In total, there are thirteen articles – seven US articles published between December 2020 and April 2021 in Washington Post, USA Today, and LA Times and six Romanian articles, all published in *Adevărul* between April 2020 and January 2021.

### 2.2. Description of the virus

In most of the US articles analysed, the virus is personified as an enemy, a strong one that hits hard, affecting people, institutions, regions, and countries and causing the death of numberless people:

(1) Hospitals across Southern California have been hit hard by the recent COVID-19 surge (US A7)

or

(2) The virus continues to rage (US A2)

**BDD-A33017 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó**
**Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:58:35 UTC)**

It is an unknown enemy that fights in a dishonest and dangerous way, spreading at a rate that is "frustrating and alarming":

(3) Johnson said the new variant was 50 to 70 percent more transmissible, spreading at a rate he called "frustrating and alarming" (US A1)

The virus is presented as an enemy that cannot be defeated:

(4) "Let me be candid with you: This virus is out of control" (US A1)

The battle is extremely intense

(5) "It's definitely hit crisis levels", the psychiatrist said (US A6)

and involves a huge number of cases – the number of cases go up –, a schema metaphor, where "up" relates to increasing amount:

(6) The government had been facing growing calls to impose further restrictions as coronavirus cases continue to skyrocket. (US A6)

Some of the linguistic metaphorical expressions suggesting the war metaphor are enemy, casualties, mass deaths, onslaught, hits hard, etc.

The virus is also personified as a thief stealing lives and changing lifestyles:

(7) COVID-19 has stolen lives, broken families, widened the wealth gap and rewired life in East L.A. (US A4)

or

(8) nearly every street corner holds some sign of the virus that has stolen more than 24,000 lives statewide, widened the wealth gap and rewired the rhythms of how we mourn, learn, work and worship. (US A4)

Other metaphors used are related to natural disasters – storm, flood, or earthquake. The virus is presented as a storm that hits in waves:

(9) We're in the midst of the mental health wave – and we're even bracing ourselves for more to follow. (US A6)

Sometimes periods of calm are mentioned:

BDD-A33017 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:58:35 UTC)

(10) During moments of relative calm, nurses share tips about caring for patients. (US A7)

COVID-19 is also presented as a flood, a natural force that cannot be controlled by humans:

(11) Heaton worries that if the hospital becomes too inundated with COVID-19 patients, it will be harder to care for people. (US A7)

Another metaphor is that of an earthquake:

(12) California accounts for more than 2 million infections and 26,500 deaths, with Southern California as an epicenter. (US A5)

The articles also include contextual metaphors, for example, the strain which refers both to the virus and to the pressure that people fighting it are under:

(13) Medical professionals are working under tremendous strains. (US A3)

In the Romanian articles, the war metaphor is also used, the virus being presented as an enemy, as indicated by such metaphorical lexical realizations as front line, casualties, etc. The virus is personified too – it is a dangerous agent as it adapts itself:

(14) *există acest risc ca virusul să sară această barieră a speciilor* (Rom A2)
'there is the risk of the virus jumping over this barrier of species'[1]

(15) *Noul coronavirus a reuşit să introducă în vocabular noi cuvinte, definiții sau concepte cum ar fi 'lockdown' (autoizolare), 'distanță fizică/sanitară', 'infodemie"' …Pe lângă asta, criza sanitară de anul trecut ne-a impus noi obiceiuri, dându-ne peste cap modul de viață cu care ne obişnuisem până nu demult.* (Rom A4)
'the new coronavirus has managed to introduce new words, definitions, or concepts in the vocabulary such as lockdown (self-isolation), physical/social distance, infodemic… Besides, last year's health crisis has imposed new habits, overturning the lifestyle we got used to recently.'

The war metaphor is used less to present the war against the virus and more for the war against false rumours – a kind of war mentioned only in Romanian articles.

1 The translations are my own throughout the article.

**BDD-A33017 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó**
**Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:58:35 UTC)**

Natural disasters are also a source domain describing the virus, which is presented as an earthquake:

(16) *În 2020 întreaga planetă fusese zguduită de pandemia COVID-19.* (Rom A4)
'In 2020, the whole planet was shattered by the COVID-19 pandemic.'

or a storm hitting in waves:

(17) *pandemia şi perspective imediată a intrării într-un al doilea val cel puțin la fel de mortal* (Rom A5)
'the pandemic and the immediate perspective of a second wave, at least as deadly'

All these features make the virus a strong opponent in battle. It shakes lives and introduces new words in people's vocabulary.

The virus is also metaphorically referred to as an ogre – a cultural metaphor:

(18) *N-a trecut mult şi a apărut în acest basm cult căpcăunul, sub forma lui covid 19.* (Rom A1)
'not long after, the ogre appeared in this literature fairy tale, under the form of COVID-19'

or as the dragon of dragons:

(19) *în lupta contra zmeului zmeilor timpurilor noastre* (Rom A1)
'in the battle against our times' dragon of dragons'

The virus is derogatorily presented as a masquerade:

(20) *mascaradei COVID-19* (Rom A4)
'of the COVID-19 masquerade'

or by means of nouns alluding to cheap food (pretzel or mullet), mock names based on puns:

(21) *epidemia COVRIG/GUVID* (Rom A4)
'COVID/pretzel/goby epidemic'

The Romanian articles also resort to contextual metaphors, an example being the X-ray, which is both a medical test and a psychological way to better understand the current situation:

BDD-A33017 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:58:35 UTC)

(22) *o radiologie aprofundată a fenomenului dezinformării* (Rom A4)
'an in-depth X-ray of the rumour phenomenon'

So, in the Romanian articles, the virus is described as an enemy, a natural disaster (earthquake, storm), and an ogre, a cultural reference to folk tales. The US articles describe the virus as an enemy or a thief and a natural disaster, the range being slightly wider – storm, flood, earthquake.

### 2.2. People's reaction to the virus

In the US articles, people's reaction to the virus is presented by means of the war metaphor. The patients are

(23) fighting for their next breath (US A7),

the medical staff are front-line soldiers, whose equipment suggests that the war is fought against an alien entity:

(24) Front-line health care workers, who wear special equipment in the battle, every nurse or doctor is encased in a respirator or mask, face shield, gown and gloves so they appear as astronauts tending the untouchable and unembraceable. (US A7)

Being such a dangerous and unpredictable enemy, the virus has to be fought with special vigilance:

(25) Johnson said, "We have a new variant that is requiring extra-special vigilance." (US A1)

and also with high speed, the underlying conceptual metaphor being SPEED IS GOOD – the measures taken to fight the virus are part of the

(26) operation warp speed (US A1).

The virus is presented as an enemy that has to be contained:

(27) "With most of the country already under extreme measures, it's clear that we need to do more together to bring this new variant under control while our vaccines are rolled out", he said. "In England, we must, therefore, go into a national lockdown which is tough enough to contain this variant." (US A1 2021)

**BDD-A33017 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó**
**Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:58:35 UTC)**

In this fight, it is not only the virus that is personified but regions too, which fare badly:

(28) If ever a region was susceptible to faring poorly during a pandemic, it is one like the Inland Empire. (US A7)

The lexical realizations are mainly related to sacrifice and loss:

(29) Inside America's ICUs, the sacrifices of health care workers never cease. (US A3)

as well as daily deaths, death toll, front-line, heroes:

(30) A growing number of Heroes Work Here signs are sprouting outside hospitals across the nation. That's appropriate. (US A3)

In the Romanian articles, the war metaphor is also used but not that frequently as in the US ones. The war is mainly fought against false rumours and, as in the US articles, it is a modern war – of a cybernetic nature, a description combined with more traditional concepts such as ample campaign, attacks, Eastern flank.

The population is required to wear protection equipment, like in war, but the ones obeying these regulations are metaphorically presented as animals – they are cowards and thus are subjected and trained:

(31) *masca devenise deja simbolul supunerii şi dresării de către autorități a cetățenilor „laşi"*. (Rom A4)
'the mask had already become the symbol of obedience and training of the 'coward' citizens by the authorities.'

The battle between the people and the virus is based on cultural metaphors – canonical Romanian literary works such as Caragiale's *A Lost Letter* (2017), which is brought to mind by the famous antithetic epithet "cleanly dirty" and by the name of the corrupt policeman Pristanda, as well as Romanian proverbs (e.g. butter wouldn't melt in his mouth) and fairy tales.

The mappings for the fairy tales are: the virus is the ogre or the dragon (powerful, dishonest, mean, dangerous); the politicians are the negative characters; the EU, Brussels, and Berlin are the rulers at the king's court (greedy, corrupt, looking after their own interests); some of the European officials are the beldames (selfish, cheating, corrupt); the vaccine is Prince Charming (fair, brave, ready to fight, and usually winning); the uncorrupted EU politicians are the characters that support

BDD-A33017 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:58:35 UTC)

Prince Charming (promoters of the public good, taking the right side, helping how and when they can) (Rom A1).

Containment metaphors are also present, for example, the spreading of the virus is contained:

(32) *Am controlat rapid răspândirea virusului* (Rom A4)
'We quickly controlled the spread of the virus'

but less frequently than in the US articles.

Contextual metaphors are used as well – for example, the advice for people to look after their immunity, the mental one included:

(33) *Aveți grijă de voi şi de imunitatea dvs., inclusiv de cea informațională pentru a vă proteja de falsele conținuturi.* (Rom A4)
'take care of your immunity, the informational one included, to protect yourselves against fake content.'

As far as people's reaction to the virus is concerned, in the Romanian articles, the metaphor of war is present (war fought against rumours, a modern type of war – cybernetic), but also more traditional references to war (attacks, flank). There are cultural metaphors, where the sources are fairy tales, and canonical literary works. The US articles include mainly metaphors related to wars (fought either on land or in the outer space with special equipment). There are also traditional references to war – death toll, front line, heroes. Semino's study (2021) criticizes the war metaphor used to present the pandemic, the reason being that it creates too much anxiety and yields the wrong impression that the people who died of COVID did not fight the virus enough. Semino associates the war metaphor with a natural disaster, another frequently used metaphor for COVID-19, which she criticizes on the same grounds.

### 2.3. The vaccine

In the US articles, a frequently used conceptual metaphor is that of the game – the fight between health experts and the virus is a game that can be won by people because of the vaccines that have been produced. Thus, the concept of the war is now moved to one of gambling, maybe in order to refer to the uncertainties related to the effects of the vaccine. The vaccine is called a "game changer", as currently the virus has the upper hand, but this is a situation that the vaccine may change.

(34) The government hopes that the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, which is cheaper to produce and easier to transport than other vaccines that are being administered, will be a "game changer". (US A1 2021)

**BDD-A33017 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó**
**Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:58:35 UTC)**

In the Romanian articles analysed, the vaccine is discussed far more often than in the US ones. The vaccine is also described by resorting to the war metaphor – it is a sniper aiming right at the bull's eye.

(35) *Expert român, despre cum acționează vaccinul anti-COVID: 'E ca lunetistul care ţinteşte exact unde trebuie'.* (Rom A2)
'Romanian expert on how the anti-COVID vaccine works: It's like the sniper that aims precisely where necessary'.

The vaccine is a weapon that will overcome the pandemic, but after the battle few will be left standing and the circumstances will be difficult:

(36) *Pandemia va fi învinsă. Dar cine mai rămâne în picioare şi în ce condiții?* (Rom A6)
'The pandemic will be defeated. But who will be left standing and under what circumstances?'

The metaphorical realizations related to war are sniper, shot, kill, people left standing, and very often campaign (used for vaccination, public health, and information campaign):

(37) *România ar fi trebuit să înceapă mai devreme campania de informare a publicului cu privire la vaccinare… „Împreună cu colegii mei am avut o serie de inițiative, cum ar fi susținerea unei campanii de vaccinare încă din luna mai… şi nu s-a înțeles că pentru succesul unei campanii de sănătate publică este necesară desfăşurarea unei campanii de informare din timp."* (Rom A2)
'Romania should have started earlier the public informational campaign about the vaccination…. "Together with my colleagues we had initiatives such as to support a vaccination campaign as early as the month of May… and it was not understood that for a public health campaign to be successful an information campaign must be organized in due time".'

The vaccine is more than a medical weapon, it is also used as an ideological and psychological one:

(38) *în cazul cel mai negru, vaccinul anti-COVID-19 va deveni armă de luptă în noul Război Rece? Va fi util şi împotriva demenței politice?* (Rom A5)
'in the worst-case scenario, will the anti-COVID vaccine become a weapon in the new Cold War? Will it be efficient against political insanity?'

BDD-A33017 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:58:35 UTC)

The vaccine is also presented by resorting to source domains such as science combined with natural environment and war: immune system, aggressive response, cytokine storm, primary immune answer, first defence line:

(39) *Ştefan Dascălu a explicat şi cum acționează vaccinul şi ce parte a sistemului imunitar o stimulează. „Răspunsul imunitar poate fi foarte agresiv. Acea furtună de cytokine este o manifestare foarte agresivă a răspunsului imunitar primar. Este prima linie de apărare."* (Rom A2).
'Ştefan Dascălu also explained how the vaccine works and which part of the immunity system it stimulates. "The immunity reaction can be very aggressive. This cytokine storm is a very aggressive manifestation of the primary immunity reaction. It is the first defence line".'

The vaccination is presented as a protection blanket, which suggests again the containment metaphor. The authorities fight the virus by containing it and aiming for a wide vaccine coverage:

(40) *Autoritățile doresc doar o acoperire vaccinală cât mai mare pentru a limita răspândirea epidemică a virusului SARS-CoV-2.* (Rom A4)
'The authorities merely want a vaccine coverage as wide as possible to restrict the epidemic spread of the Sars-Cov-2 virus.'

The most frequently used metaphor is that of a race, used to describe vaccines, countries and continents, which are all personified. Countries are ranked in terms of the percentage of the population's immunization:

(41) *Ce procent de imunizare anti-COVID are România în clasamentul mondial.* (Rom A6)
'Romania's anti-COVID immunization percentage in the world ranking'

or

(42) *Israelul continuă să conducă, de departe, în topul mondial.* (Rom A6)
'Israel continues to lead by far in the world ranking'.

The country finishing the race first is awarded the gold medal:

(43) *Cui să i se dea medalia pentru performanțe deosebite în procurarea rapidă şi în suficiente cantități ale vaccinurilor Biontech-Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Moderna?* (Rom A1)

**BDD-A33017 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó**
**Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:58:35 UTC)**

'Who should be awarded the gold medal for special performances in purchasing quickly and in sufficient amount the Biontech-Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Moderna vaccines?'

The vaccines themselves are in a race against each other, as they are called candidates to be selected in terms of their prices:

(44) *Veți avea o serie de prețuri diferite, în funcție de care vaccinuri candidate vor reuşi.* (Rom A3)
'You will have a range of different prices depending on which candidate vaccines will win.'

Another source domain is business, as several articles present the vaccine as a merchandise that is in high demand and will be distributed:

(45) *UE, Germania şi Japonia oferind fonduri pentru ca vaccinurile să fie accesibile în mod echitabil, repetând mesajul că acestea să fie considerate „bun global".* (Rom A5)
'The EU, Germany, and Japan offering funds so that the vaccines should be fairly accessible, repeating the message that they should be considered a "global good".'

The business metaphor is emphasized by lexical choices such as global demand, power of negotiation, financing, investment risks, and goods. Thus, while in the Romanian articles the vaccine is presented by resorting to source domains such as war, race, or business, the US articles resort to the game metaphor.

## 3. Conclusions

The analysis of the thirteen articles representing a convenience and non-probability sample can be considered as indicative of a trend in terms of the types of metaphors used. Both the Romanian and the US articles analysed present the COVID crisis by resorting to a wide range of metaphors; this new situation is described by metaphors that are already familiar but are now put to a new use. So, the metaphors encountered are towards the more conventional end.

In terms of the three analysed areas – the virus, people's reaction to it, and the vaccine –, the metaphors in the thirteen articles present both similarities and differences. The common source domains used in the Romanian and the US articles are war and natural environment catastrophes. The virus is a natural disaster, a storm hitting in waves, an earthquake. It is personified in both types

BDD-A33017 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:58:35 UTC)

of articles as an enemy conscientiously affecting and destroying people's lives. In one of the Romanian articles, mock names (from the cooking source domain) are also used. The difference as to the presentation of the vaccine is that it is based on the gambling metaphor (the US articles) and the race metaphor (the Romanian articles).

The most frequently used conceptual metaphor is that of the war, which has not only traditional characteristics (heroes, victims, tactics, etc.) but also more uncommon ones (a battle in the outer space, a cybernetic war, etc.). In the analysed Romanian articles, the war is also fought against false rumours and misinformation.

Other conceptual metaphors that are used are gambling (in the US ones), race and trade (in the Romanian ones), and personification (both). In the thirteen articles, the war metaphor appears more frequently in the US ones, while the competition one is more frequent in the Romanian ones; containment metaphors appear more frequently in the US articles.

The metaphors in both types of articles are complex, as the target domain is described by resorting to several source domains (for example, the virus is an enemy, a natural disaster) and both kinds of articles resort to diversified and specific level metaphors. As far as the two metaphorical systems are concerned (the Chain Structure and the Event Structure), the Chain Structure one is more frequently used in both types of newspapers.

The analysis indicates that for the 13 articles the differences between the Romanian and the US articles as far as the metaphors used are concerned are mainly of intensity and frequency of use, a situation which is probably accounted for by cultural differences. However, the study should be continued by including a larger number of articles, published in Romanian and US broadsheets.

## References

Black, Max. 1962. *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Caragiale, Ion-Luca. 2017 [1884]. *O scrisoare pierdută* [A Lost Letter]. Bucharest: Myebook.

Chilton, Paul. 1996. *Security Metaphors: Cold War Discourse from Containment to Common House.* New York: Peter Lang.

Goatly, Andrew. 1998 [1997]. *The Language of Metaphors*. London: Routledge.

Grady, Joseph. 1999. A typology for motivation for conceptual metaphor. In Raymond Gibbs–Gerard Steen (eds), *Metaphor in Cognitive Linguistics*, 79–100. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Kövecses, Zoltán. 2010 [2000]. *Metaphor. A Practical Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**BDD-A33017 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó**
**Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:58:35 UTC)**

Lakoff, George. 1993. The contemporary theory of metaphor. In Andrew Ortony (ed.), *Metaphor and Thought*, 202–251 New York: Cambridge University Press.
Lakoff, George–Mark Johnson. 1980. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Lakoff, George–Mark Turner. 1989. *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor.* Chicago: Chicago University Press.
Mottier, Veronique. 2008. Metaphors, mini-narratives and Foucauldian discourse theory. In Terrell Carver–Jernej Pikalo (eds), *Political Language and Metaphor. Interpreting and Changing the World*, 182–193. London–New York: Routledge.
Musolff, Andreas. 2005. Genetic information as part of the "Great Chain of Being". *Metaphorik.de* 8: 52–70.
Semino, Elena. 2021. "Not soldiers but fire-fighters" – Metaphors and Covid-19. *Health Communication* 36(1): 51–58. *https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346793964_Not_Soldiers_but_Fire-fighters_-Metaphors_and_Covid-19#fullTextFileContent* (Last accessed: 10 July 2021).

## Articles

Adam, Karla–Jennifer Hassan–Ben Guarino. 2021. Third national lockdown announced in England amid coronavirus surge driven by variant strain. *The Washington Post* 8 January 2021. *https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/britain-coronavirus-surge-lockdown/2021 /01/ 04/ 4f3fafefe6-4e95-11eb-a1f5-fdaf28cfca90_story.html* (Last accessed: 10 March 2021).
Editorial Board. 2020. Inside America's ICUs, the sacrifices of health care workers never cease. *US Today* 14 December 2020. *https://eu.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2020/12/14/our-view-provide-covid-vaccines-and-reinforcements-heroic-medical-staff/3883051001/* (Last accessed: 11 March 2021).
— 2021. COVID-19 vaccine rollout: Trump, Health and Human Services are throwing away their shot. Our View: What happened to 100 million vaccination doses by the end of the year? Operation Warp Speed is being wasted as thousands are dying daily in America. *USA Today* 1 April 2021. *https://eu.usatoday.com/story/opinion/todaysdebate/2021/01/04/covid-vaccine-trump-hhs-throwing-away-their-shot-editorials-debates/4120404001/* (Last accessed: 1 March 2021).
Gerber, Marisa–Andrea Castillo–Julia Barajas–Andrew J. Campa. 2020. COVID-19 has stolen lives, broken families, widened the wealth gap and rewired life in East. *Los Angeles Times* 28 December 2020. *https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-12-28/coronavirus-east-la* (Last accessed: 9 March 2021).

BDD-A33017 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:58:35 UTC)

Iancu, Petre. 2021. Despre zmeul Covid cel rău şi vaccinul-frumos care-l va răpune [About the the bad Covid dragon and the charming vaccine that will slaughter it]. *Adevărul* 29 January. *https://adevarul.ro/international/in-lume/despre-zmeul-covid-rau-vaccinul-frumos-care-l-rapune-1_6013dc8d5163ec427160f809/index.html* (Last accessed: 9 March 2021).

King, Laura. 2021. COVID fatalities in U.S. top 350,000. Refuting Trump, Fauci says deaths are "not fake". *Los Angeles Times* 1 March 2021. *https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2021-01-03/trump-claims-covid-deaths-exaggerated-fauci-pushes-back* (Last accessed: 16 March 2021).

Lică, Ştefan. 2021. Expert român, despre cum acționează vaccinul anti-COVID: „E ca lunetistul care țintește exact unde trebuie" [Romanian expert on how the anti-COVID vaccine acts: "It's like the sniper that shoots precisely where necessary"]. *Adevărul* 19 January 2021. *https://adevarul.ro/locale/cluj-napoca/expert-roman-despre-actioneaza-vaccinul-anti-covid-e- lunetistul-tinteste-exact-trebuie-1_60059bf15163ec 4271125185 / index.html* (Last accessed: 16 March 2021).

Miller, Wayne, G. 2021. COVID-19 taking a toll: Some doctors see "massive pandemic of mentally ill adolescents". *USA Today* 2 March 2021. *https:// eu.usatoday. com/ story/ life/ health-wellness/2021/02/25/children-covid-and-mental- health-wave/4572686001/* (Last accessed: 16 March 2021).

News.ro. 2020. O alianță pentru finanțarea vaccinurilor destinate Covid-19 afirmă că ținta maximă de preț este de 40 de dolari [An alliance to finance the COVID-19 vaccines states that the maximum price target is of 40 dollars]. *Adevărul* 28 July 2020. *https:// adevarul.ro/economie/stiri-economice/o-alianta-finantarea-vaccinurilor-destinate-covid-19- afirma-tinta-maxima-pret-40-dolari-1_5f1f93ed5163ec42716ade31/index.html* (Last accessed: 14 March 2021).

Țîbrigan, Nicolae. 2021. Top 10 teme conspiraționiste despre COVID-19 în anul 2020 [Top 10 conspiracy theories about COVID-19 in the year 2020]. *Adevărul* 21 February 2021. *https://adevarul.ro/news/eveniment/top-10-teme-conspirationiste-despre-covid-19-anul-2020-1_6017101e5163ec427176c7d9/index.html* (Last accessed: 5 March 2021).

Unteanu, Cristian. 2020a. Vaccinul anti-COVID-19, problema unei lumi bolnave de virusul demenței politice [The anti-COVID-19 Vaccine – The issue of a world ill with political dementia virus]. *Adevărul* 12 September 2020. *https://adevarul.ro/international/in-lume/vaccinul-anti-covid-19-problema-lumi-bolnave-virusul-dementei-politice-15f5c82bf5163ec4271e 86879 /index.html* (Last accessed: 2 March 2021).

**BDD-A33017 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó**
**Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:58:35 UTC)**

— 2020b. Pandemia va fi învinsă. Dar cine mai rămâne în picioare şi în ce condiţii? [The pandemic will be defeated. But who will remain standing and under what circumstances?]. *Adevărul* 25 April 2020. *https://adevarul.ro/news/societate/ce-procent-imunizare-anti-covid-romania-clasamentulmondial-6019915e5163ec42718bdc24-/index.html* (Last accessed: 12 March 2021).

Vives, Rubens. 2021. "They're coming in younger and coming in sicker": One hospital's war with coronavirus. *Los Angeles Times* 1 April 2021. *https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-01-04/san-bernardino-county-hospital-slammed-covid-19-cases* (Last accessed: 12 March 2021).

**BDD-A33017 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó**
**Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:58:35 UTC)**